

# **SURINAME 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Suriname is a constitutional democracy with a president elected by the unicameral National Assembly. Elections for the National Assembly took place in May 2020. International observers considered these elections to be free and fair. In July 2020 the National Assembly elected Chandrikapersad Santokhi as president.

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the military police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports of entry. All elements of the military are under the control of the Ministry of Defense. Civilian police bear primary responsibility for maintaining law and order and report to the Ministry of Justice and Police. Police and military personnel continued to conduct regular, joint patrols as part of the government's efforts to combat crime, and both also served jointly on special security teams. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the military and police. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of cruel and degrading treatment of individuals by police, serious and widespread acts of corruption, and the existence of some of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took steps to investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, whether in the security forces or elsewhere in the government. Corruption cases were investigated, and the government implemented the laws on corruption effectively at times.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

On July 22, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 2012 amendment to the Amnesty Law violated the constitution and international conventions to which the country is party. Based on this ruling, the National Assembly voted on August 28 to revoke the 2012 amendment and restore the original text of the 1989 Amnesty Law. The decision and change in law effectively ended the ability of former military dictator and former democratically elected president Desire Bouterse and other convicted individuals to receive amnesty for the December 1982 murders. Subsequently, on August 30, a court-martial reaffirmed and upheld the 2019 conviction and 20-year sentence against Bouterse for the December 1982 extrajudicial killing of 15 political opponents.

In October a court convicted 14 of the 18 prison officials on trial for excessive use of force resulting in the death of prisoner Giovanni Griffith in 2019 in the Hazard Penitentiary Facility in Nickerie. All 14 convicted officials received suspended sentences of two years in prison and two years of probation. Three of the defendants in the case were acquitted due to lack of evidence, and the case against one was terminated because the defendant died during the trial.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

## **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

While the law prohibits such practices, human rights groups, defense attorneys, and media reported mistreatment by police, including unnecessary use of force during arrests and beatings of persons in detention. In May a lawyer told the press that her client was knocked to the ground and then kicked in the mouth by police officers while detained at the Keizerstraat detention facility.

Impunity was not a widespread problem within the police force. The Personnel Investigation Department investigated allegations reported by citizens against police and took appropriate disciplinary action. The Internal Affairs Unit conducted its own investigations involving various forms of misconduct. Penalties varied from reprimands to the dismissal of officers as well as prison sentences.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions generally met minimum international standards, but there were numerous problems in the country's 21 detention centers.

**Physical Conditions:** There were no significant reports regarding prison center conditions that raised human rights concerns. Nonetheless, aging prisons required upgrades and were understaffed. Facilities lacked adequate emergency exits. Cells had individual padlocks. There were no emergency evacuation drills. There were multiple outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus at different prison facilities throughout the year, with both prisoners and guards testing positive. There were reports of shortages of water and cleaning supplies in prison facilities, leading to unsanitary conditions.

As a result of COVID-19 precautionary measures, visitation rights for persons incarcerated in prisons were significantly restricted and limited to drop-offs of clothing and other essentials. Contact with family and others, including clergy, was also restricted. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and families reported that authorities made very little effort to find ways for prisoners to communicate with their families and clergy.

There were cases when persons in pretrial detention were housed with convicts.

Overcrowding was a problem in the detention centers. Older buildings had inadequate lighting, poor ventilation, poor sanitation, and flooding in some cases. Police had no standard operating procedures for management of detention facilities. Police were assigned to detention facilities without any specialized training. Facilities lacked adequate guards, relying instead on regular-duty police when additional assistance was necessary. Officers did not have adequate personal protective health equipment to handle detainees with medical problems.

At least two detention facilities closed because they failed to meet minimum standards for operation. The minister of justice and police confirmed to the National Assembly in June that some facilities had to be closed due to lack of maintenance, high chance of escape, and unsanitary conditions.

COVID-19 outbreaks at several police stations and the detention facilities connected to them further limited detention capacity and prompted authorities to develop new protocols for processing detainees. One detention facility was identified as a quarantine facility where all new detainees spent the first 10 days of their detention in quarantine. Due to the absence of security staff who departed the facility because they lacked the necessary health equipment such as masks and gloves to deal with infected prisoners, 13 detainees escaped.

Lawyers reported on multiple occasions that their clients were denied access to medical care while in detention. These denials related both to detainees with preexisting conditions and detainees injured while in detention. One person in pretrial detention died because of an untreated medical condition. Repeated requests from his lawyer to have the suspect released pending trial due to medical circumstances were denied.

**Administration:** Authorities investigated credible allegations of mistreatment. Government officials continued regular monitoring of prison and detention center conditions.

**Independent Monitoring:** In general the government permitted monitoring visits by independent human rights observers. Access to facilities was, however, limited due to COVID-19 precautionary measures.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

#### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

Police apprehended individuals openly with warrants based on sufficient evidence and brought them before an independent judiciary. The law provides that detainees should be brought before a judge within seven days to determine the legality of their arrest, and courts generally met the seven-day deadline. An assistant district attorney or a police inspector may authorize incommunicado detention. If additional time is needed to investigate a charge, a judge may extend the detention

period in 30-day increments up to a total of 150 days. There is no bail system. Release pending trial depends on the type of crime committed and the judge handling the case. Detainees receive prompt access to counsel of their choosing, but the prosecutor may prohibit access if the prosecutor believes access could harm the investigation. Legal counsel is provided at no charge for indigent detainees. Detainees are allowed weekly visits from family members.

**Pretrial Detention:** Both the criminal and civil courts experienced multiple delays due to COVID-19, prolonging the pretrial detention of those awaiting trial in criminal court. In keeping with COVID-19 precautionary measures, the Court of Justice put in place an alternative system that allowed judges to question detainees via telephone, with their lawyers present, to meet required deadlines. In multiple cases defense attorneys successfully pleaded for their clients to be released pending trial, citing the threat of COVID-19 infection.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary.

There were 29 judges in the country, well short of the estimated 40 needed for proper functioning of the judicial system, and there was a significant backlog of cases. Cases both in criminal and civil courts were postponed repeatedly for various reasons, adding significantly to the backlog. Multiple closures of the courts due to COVID-19 infections led to additional delays in both criminal and civil procedures, extending the case backlog even further. In the civil courts, the backlog was estimated to be between five and six years.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants have a right to be informed promptly of the charges against them. Defendants have the right to trial without undue delay and the right to counsel. There were court-assigned attorneys for both the civil and criminal systems. All trials are public except for indecency offenses and offenses involving children. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal.

Defendants have the right to be present at their trial and may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Defendants' attorneys may question witnesses and present witnesses and evidence on the defendant's behalf. The courts assign private-sector lawyers to defend indigent detainees. If necessary, free interpretation is provided. The law protects the names of the accused, and authorities do not release those names to the public or media prior to conviction.

The right to trial without undue delay was consistently under pressure due to lack of sufficient judges to process cases. Most cases, particularly high-profile cases, were processed only once per month. Delays were further exacerbated by multiple closures or technical incapacities due to COVID-19. In addition to noting the need for additional judges and clerks, the president of the Court of Justice noted in October that cases were also delayed because the court lacked experts to assist in the judicial investigation of complex cases primarily involving cross-border crimes.

Legal assistance to indigent detainees was under pressure as lawyers threatened to cease legal assistance due to lack of payment by the government. Many cases requiring interpreters or psychologists were delayed due to lack of pay for those specialists.

There are parallel military and civilian court systems, and military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law. The military courts followed the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from military courts to the civil system.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals or organizations have the right to seek civil remedies for human rights violations in local courts. Individuals and organizations have the right to appeal decisions to regional human rights bodies; most cases are brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled against the country in several cases, but the government only

sporadically enforced those rulings; the government sometimes took no action (see section 6, Indigenous Peoples).

## **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The law prohibits such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

The April 2020 case of the alleged attempted kidnapping of a former candidate for the National Assembly, Rodney Cairo, remained under judicial investigation. Security personnel allegedly acting on the orders of the then director of national security, Lieutenant Colonel Danielle Veira, raided Cairo's home after Cairo criticized the then minister of defense on his Facebook page. Veira was subsequently relieved of her duties. In January Veira was officially identified as a suspect in the Cairo case, in which the pending charges were hostage taking, complicity to hostage taking, incitement to hostage taking, armed robbery, and complicity to armed robbery.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media. While there are no formal restrictions on the press, actions by government and nongovernment actors impeded the ability of independent media to conduct their work. The government does not have laws that facilitate access to public information; access to high-ranking government officials and public information can be cumbersome.

On December 14, journalist Jason Pinas of the daily newspaper *De Ware Tijd* was attacked and beaten by members of Vice President Ronnie Brunswijk's security detail while taking photographs of the vice president and alleged supporters. Security agents also took Pinas's phone. On December 16, President Santokhi asked the acting attorney general to investigate the matter. The Prosecutors' Office

stated on December 23 that it identified and questioned three suspects, including a police officer, who admitted to the attack and offered to apologize and pay for damages. Despite their admission of assault, the suspects were released. At year's end the case was pending.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions:** Media freely criticized the government on policy issues and for what it claimed was restricted access to the government and governmental events. Government representatives contended there was no censorship, self-censorship, or content restriction. The political affiliations of individual news outlets had little apparent relationship to their criticism.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The country's criminal defamation laws carry harsh penalties for convictions, with prison terms between three months and seven years. The harshest penalty is for expressing public enmity, hatred, or contempt towards the government.

### **Internet Freedom**

There were no government restrictions on access to the internet, and the government asserted it did not monitor private, online communications without appropriate legal oversight. Nevertheless, journalists, members of the political opposition and their supporters, and other independent entities alleged government interference with and unlawful oversight of email and social media accounts.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The law provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.



#### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

#### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

#### **f. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has a system for providing protection to refugees. The country relied on UNHCR to assign refugee or asylum seeker status. Once status is confirmed, refugees or asylum seekers obtain residency permits under the alien legislation law. Those with a UNHCR certificate receive a special certificate from the Ministry of Labor to work.

#### **g. Stateless Persons**

An amendment in 2014 to the Citizenship Law automatically grants citizenship to persons born in the country if that person is not automatically eligible for the citizenship of one of the parents. Children born prior to this amendment to undocumented parents are not eligible to receive citizenship until they turn 18. These children faced problems in access to various services, including education. There were reported cases of stateless children or children of foreign parents facing problems registering in schools due to improper or incomplete residency documentation.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** The constitution provides for direct election of the 51-member National Assembly no later than five years after the prior election date. The National Assembly, in turn, elects the president by a two-thirds majority vote. Following legislative elections in May 2020, the National Assembly unanimously elected Chandrikapersad Santokhi as president on July 13, 2020.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The law prohibits political organizations from running on a combination ticket in elections, putting at a disadvantage smaller parties that seek to combine their strength to challenge larger parties.

Smaller parties and activists stated the 2019 introduction of a registration fee for political parties to participate in elections was an attempt to form an additional burden for smaller or less wealthy parties to take part in the elections. Despite these obstacles, 17 of the 20 parties that initially registered to take part in the elections were found eligible and participated.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No laws limit participation of women and members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government implemented the law effectively at times. The 2017 Anti-Corruption Law, which was unanimously approved by the National Assembly, had not been implemented as of October, but authorities stated they were able to prosecute cases of corruption based on existing law.

Corruption cases reported to the Attorney General's Office were investigated. There were numerous accusations from political opponents, civil society, and media that officials engaged in corrupt practices.

**Corruption:** Practically every sector of government was accused of corruption, including the Central Bank of Suriname and state-owned companies such as the Postal Bank and the government health insurance company SZF.

The trial against the former minister of finance Gillmore Hoefdraad, former Central Bank governor Robert van Trikt, and three others continued during the year. The suspects were charged with fraud, corruption, money laundering, and other offenses. All the suspects, except for Hoefdraad, continued to be detained. Hoefdraad was still at large, with an INTERPOL Red Notice issued against him in July. The suspects faced sentencing recommendations varying between four and 12 years' imprisonment.

In November 2020 former vice president Ashwin Adhin was detained for alleged destruction and misappropriation of government property. At the end of the year, the judicial investigation of Adhin was underway. In separate proceedings accomplices of Adhin who testified that they acted on Adhin's orders were found guilty and convicted. Throughout the year numerous cases of alleged corruption by members of the 2010-20 Bouterse government were submitted for investigation.

The government strengthened its capacity to investigate and prosecute alleged cases of corruption. Different government entities signed cooperation agreements to share information and potential evidence for use in prosecuting alleged cases of corruption.

The Santokhi government faced its own allegations of corruption and nepotism, with formal complaints of alleged corruption filed against the ministers of finance and foreign affairs. The attorney general subsequently determined that no evidence of corruption could be found. There were allegations of corruption in land title issuance and land acquisition. NGOs and political parties outside the National Assembly accused the government of lacking political will to tackle corruption.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A number of independent domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. NGOs reported generally positive relationships with government officials, although officials were not always responsive to their views.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Justice and Police was responsible for advising the government on regional and international proceedings against the state concerning human rights. It was also responsible for preparing the state's response to various international human rights reports. Its independence was limited, as it was exclusively under executive branch control. It did not solicit or investigate public complaints. The National Assembly has a commission dealing with human rights issues.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape of men and women, including spousal rape, and prescribes penalties for rape or forcible sexual assault of 12 to 15 years' imprisonment and a substantial fine. The government enforced the law effectively, including applying its provisions in cases involving rape of men. Authorities investigated and prosecuted all reported cases of sexual abuse.

Violence against women remained a serious and pervasive problem. The law imposes sentences of four to eight years' imprisonment for domestic violence. The Victim Assistance Bureau of the Ministry of Justice and Police provided resources and counseling for victims of domestic violence and raised awareness about domestic violence through public television programs. There were victims' rooms in police stations in Paramaribo and Nickerie. Authorities trained police units to assist survivors and perpetrators of sexual crimes and domestic violence. The Victim Assistance Bureau managed a shelter for female victims of domestic

violence and children up to age 12 where victims can stay for up to three months. Use of the shelter was far below its capacity.

A second shelter for women in crisis situations opened in December 2020 with the capacity to provide temporary housing for 13 women and their children for up to six months. The shelter was an NGO initiative that received both government and private-sector support. The COVID-19 pandemic hampered the shelter's ability to function.

The Office of Gender Affairs in the Ministry of Home Affairs continued its awareness programs on domestic violence against women and girls throughout the year. It also supported other organizations that assisted victims of domestic violence. While COVID-19 precautionary measures limited in-person programming, awareness messaging continued. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, funding initially allocated for the UN's Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate, and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean program was reallocated to strengthen the responsiveness of organizations that provided support in cases of domestic violence during the pandemic.

**Sexual Harassment:** There is no specific legislation criminalizing sexual harassment, but prosecutors cited various laws when filing sexual harassment cases. There were no reported court cases involving sexual harassment in the workplace.

Stalking is a criminal offense, and police may investigate possible cases of stalking without a formal complaint. Pending investigation, police may issue temporary restraining orders limiting contact between victim and suspect for up to 30 days. If found guilty, offenders can receive prison sentences ranging from four to 12 years and a large fine. The government enforced the law effectively.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Information on reproductive health was widely available, and no legal barriers or government policies adversely affected access to contraceptives. In some rural areas, however, skilled health-care workers were sometimes not readily available due to the distances between villages.

Vulnerable populations were able to provide informed consent to medical treatment affecting reproductive health. In cases concerning persons with disabilities unable to provide consent, a legal guardian must be present.

Survivors of sexual violence had access to government-supported health insurance that arranged services for sexual and reproductive health. Emergency contraception in cases of rape was available during medical treatment of the victim. Survivors requested assistance either through the Ministry of Social Affairs, which was primarily responsible for issuing government-supported health insurance, or through the Bureau of Victim Care in the Ministry of Justice and Police, which provided counseling and health-care assistance to victims.

The maternal death rate in 2017 was 120 per 100,000 live births. The high rate of maternal mortality was attributed to infections (27 percent), bleeding (20 percent), and high blood pressure (14 percent). Of maternal mortality cases, 63 percent occurred postpartum. A July study reported that postnatal care was weak, as women often did not return to the doctor until six weeks after delivery for their child's first doctor's visit. Complications resulting from pregnancy or delivery were often not identified on a timely basis.

In mid-October the Steering Group for Maternal and Neonatal Care issued a warning that the COVID-19 pandemic raised maternal mortality. While the average number of women dying during or around pregnancy was 13 per year, between January and September, 30 women died during pregnancy, of whom 19 died due to COVID-19.

The adolescent birth rate for girls ages 15 to 19 was 65 per 1,000. There was a high rate of adolescent pregnancy in low-income city neighborhoods and in the interior of the country. Most adolescents in this age group claimed to have an unmet need for comprehensive sexual education. These pregnancies often led to girls dropping out of school, limiting their chances for development. Research released in July showed that the children from these early births themselves had children at a very early age.

**Discrimination:** The law provides for the protection of a woman's right to equal access to education, employment, and property. Nonetheless, women experienced

discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work as men. No law specifically addresses sexual harassment in the workplace. The law does not mandate equal work for equal pay. No law prohibits gender discrimination for access to credit.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The law states that every person has equal rights to the protection of person and goods. It further states that nobody may be discriminated against based on his or her birth, gender, race, language, religion, descent, education, political beliefs, economic position, social circumstance, or any other status. The government enforced these protections effectively.

While there were no reported cases of governmental or societal violence against members of racial, ethnic, or national minorities, there was an increase in racial discrimination and ethnically focused messaging on social media.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

The law affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous peoples. The IACHR identified the Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior, approximately 22 percent of the population) as tribal peoples and thus entitled to the same rights as the indigenous Amerindian communities (approximately 4 percent of the population).

Maroons and Amerindians living in the remote and undeveloped interior had limited access to education, employment, and health and social services. Both groups participated in decisions affecting their traditions and cultures, but they had limited influence in decisions affecting exploitation of energy, minerals, timber, or other natural resources on their lands. Both Maroons and Amerindians took part in regional governing bodies, as well as in the National Assembly, and were part of the governing coalition.

The government recognizes the different Maroon and indigenous tribes, but the tribes hold no special status under national law, and there was no effective demarcation of their lands. Because authorities did not effectively demarcate or police Amerindian and Maroon lands, these populations faced problems with

illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining. No laws grant indigenous peoples the right to share in the revenues from the exploitation of resources on their traditional lands. Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive these communities away from their traditional settlements. Many of these miners were themselves tribal or supported by tribal groups. Mercury runoff from these operations, as well as riverbank erosion, contaminated drinking water and threatened traditional food sources, especially freshwater fish.

Maroon and Amerindian groups complained about the government granting land within traditional indigenous peoples' territories to third parties, who sometimes prevented the villagers from engaging in their traditional activities on those lands.

In August the government took initial steps towards the implementation of the 2015 ruling of the IACHR in the case of the Kalina and Lokono peoples of Marowijne. The government's Council of Ministers approved part of the one-million-dollar transfer to the community development fund it was ordered to establish under the ruling. These funds were to be used for education, health care, food supply, and security.

In April the Mulukot Foundation, Association of Indigenous Village Heads, and NGO Cultural Survival submitted a shadow report to the UN Human Rights Council as part of the country's Universal Periodic Review in November, in which the organizations concluded that the government had not met its human rights obligations towards indigenous peoples.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** The law provides that citizenship transmits to a child when either the father or mother has Surinamese citizenship at the time of birth; when the parent is Surinamese but has died before the birth; or if the child is born in the country's territory and does not automatically acquire citizenship of another country. Births must be registered with the Civil Registry within one week. Failure to do so within the mandated period results in a more cumbersome process of registration.



**Child Abuse:** Children suffered a high rate of physical and mental abuse. According to the most recent (2018) UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 88 percent of children ages two to 14 suffered either physical or mental abuse. In rural areas the rate was even higher, at 92 percent. Results of a study released in March showed that while an estimated 70,000 children encountered some form of abuse each year, only approximately 400 cases were reported.

To avoid intimidation by perpetrators, there were arrangements for children to testify in special chambers at legal proceedings. The Youth Affairs Office continued to raise awareness about sexual abuse, drugs, and alcohol through a weekly television program. The Youth Support Hotline, which received government support, expanded its services from eight hours per day to 24-hour service, with access to services through its social media pages as well. The hotline provided confidential advice and aid to children in need. UNICEF continued to cooperate with the government to train officials from various ministries dealing with children and children's rights. The Ministry of Justice and Police operated three child protection centers in different parts of the country.

With the support of UNICEF, the Academic Hospital Paramaribo opened a social pediatric unit for abused children in March. The unit provided child victims of abuse with medical, social, and psychological guidance and worked with authorities to identify abusers.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** Parental permission to marry is required until the age of 21. The marriage law sets the minimum age of marriage at 15 for girls and 17 for boys, provided parents of the parties agree to the marriage. Children in certain tribal communities often married at an age younger than that set by the law.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the sale of children, offering or procuring a child for commercial child sexual exploitation, and practices related to child pornography. Authorities investigated all reported abuses. While the legal age of sexual consent is 14, trafficking-in-persons legislation makes illegal the sexual exploitation of a person younger than age 18. Criminal law penalizes persons responsible for recruiting children into prostitution and provides penalties of up to six years'

imprisonment and a significant fine for pimping. The law also prohibits child pornography, which carries a maximum penalty of six years' imprisonment and a fine. Lack of economic opportunities led to an increasing number of adolescent boys and girls trafficked for sex, sometimes by their parents, to support the family or to pay for education. One NGO reported commercial sexual exploitation of children as young as 14. While the country was not generally considered a destination for child sex tourism, in prior years there were cases of tourists involved in sexual exploitation of children.

Several cases of sexual exploitation, sexual and physical abuse, and neglect came to trial. Victims included both boys and girls. Sentences ranged up to 10 years in prison.

**Institutionalized Children:** Orphanages and other shelters for children are not government facilities and relied on private funds and charitable donations. As a result care for children was unequal and often inadequate. There were reported cases of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in some shelter facilities.

In July the Prosecutors' Office introduced a new model for processing criminal cases involving youth delinquents. Children who have committed a simple, nonviolent criminal offense were sentenced to either an education program or a work project aimed at correcting their behavior. This new model was intended to be corrective rather than punitive and aimed to prevent children from becoming repeat offenders. The project was financed through UNICEF.

**International Child Abductions:** The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

There was a Jewish community of approximately 100 persons. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts or discrimination.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

No laws specifically prohibit discrimination against persons with physical or mental disabilities. Persons with disabilities are eligible to receive general health benefits, but the process can be cumbersome. Persons with disabilities experienced discrimination when applying for jobs and services. Authorities provided some training programs for persons with impaired vision or other disabilities. No laws or programs required access to buildings for persons with disabilities. There is also no law that requires government information and communication to be provided in accessible formats. The government sought to include sign language interpreters for government programming on television. A judge may rule to deny a person with a cognitive disability the right to vote, to take part in business transactions, or to sign legal agreements.

There was secondary and technical education for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, but not for those with visual disabilities. The Foundation for the Blind teaches braille and life skills to persons who are visually impaired. Children with disabilities attended school at a far lower rate than their peers without a disability. Depending on the disability, children could attend mainstream schools. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

## **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

Persons with HIV and AIDS experienced discrimination in employment, housing, and medical services. Medical treatment is free for persons with HIV or AIDS covered under government insurance, but private insurers did not cover such treatment. NGOs reported discriminatory testing, and subsequent denial of assistance for persons with HIV or AIDS who applied for housing assistance from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on**

## **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Activists stated there were few official reports of violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, primarily due to fear of retribution and because authorities did not take seriously complaints filed by members of the LGBTQI+ community. There were reports of discrimination against persons in the LGBTQI+ community in employment and housing.

The law prohibits discrimination and hate speech based on sexual orientation, specifically protecting the LGBTQI+ community. Violations are punishable by a fine or prison sentence of up to one year. The law does not set standards for determining what constitutes such discrimination or hate speech. The law on retirement benefits specifically excludes same-sex couples from benefits granted to heterosexual couples.

Within the LGBTQI+ community, the transgender community faced the most stigmatization and discrimination. Transgender women arrested or detained by police were placed in detention facilities for men, where they faced harassment and violence from other detainees.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, the right to bargain collectively, and the right to strike. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination, requires that workers terminated for union activity be reinstated, and prohibits employer interference in union activities. Labor laws do not cover undocumented foreign workers.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws involving the private sector. Penalties were commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination.

In isolated cases private employers refused to bargain under or recognize collective bargaining rights, but the unions usually pressured the employers to negotiate.

There were some reports that companies exploited legislative gaps and hired more contract employees than direct-hire staff to perform core business functions in order to cut costs.

The government itself (the largest employer in the country) was not bound by these laws, since it deemed labor laws apply only to private employees, not civil servants.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government investigated and, when necessary, prosecuted reported cases of forced labor. Penalties were commensurate with those for analogous crimes, such as kidnapping. Labor inspectors received training on detecting forced labor. Labor inspectors who were trained to identify trafficking victims were legally authorized to conduct inspections outside formal workplaces but lacked the manpower and capacity to do so.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at [www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/](http://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/).

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor. The law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 and the minimum age for working on fishing vessels at 18. The law also specifies the circumstances under which children younger than 16 can perform certain types of labor. By law children ages 13 to 15 are allowed to assist in nonindustrial work of a light nature under specific circumstances. The law further specifies the responsibilities of employers and parents when employing young persons. Employers need a special exemption for children ages 13 and 14 to do any type of work. The law prohibits children younger than 18 from doing hazardous work, defined as work dangerous to life, health, and decency. The law also sets forth the penalties and fines that employers and parents can face when violating the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for analogous crimes, such as kidnapping. Children continued to be subjected to some of the worst forms of child labor, including dangerous tasks and possible exposure to

hazardous substances in gold mines and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at [www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings).

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits employment discrimination based on birth, sex, race, language, religious origin, education, political beliefs, economic position, or any other status. The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. There was enforcement of the law, but there was still discrimination reported in employment based on disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV or AIDS status. Penalties were commensurate with laws related to civil rights, such as election interference. Women's pay was less than men's pay (see section 6, Women). Individuals with disabilities and LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination in hiring and the workplace. The law protects pregnant women from dismissal and formalizes maternity leave for women and paternity leave and special leave for fathers or other family members in case a mother is unable to take care of a child after birth. As with other labor laws, this law is not applicable to government employees.

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law provides for a national minimum wage. The minimum wage was below the World Bank poverty income level. In the private sector, most unions were able to negotiate wage increases. The National Wage Council annually determines the minimum wage. In April the first National Wage Council was installed. This tripartite council included representatives of the government, employers, and labor unions, and it advised the minister of labor on a new general minimum wage or a sector-based minimum wage.

Work above 45 hours per week on a regular basis requires special government permission, which was routinely granted. The law requires premium pay for such overtime work, prohibits excessive overtime, requires a 24-hour rest period per week, and stipulates paid annual holidays. Overtime is generally limited to four

hours per day, for a maximum 12-hour workday. During the holiday season, the retail sector has a blanket permit allowing for work up to 15 hours a day, including seven hours of overtime. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The government set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards which generally were current and appropriate for the main industries in the country. Inspectors in the Occupational Health and Safety Division in the Ministry of Labor did not effectively enforce OSH laws in the informal sector. Penalties for violations of OSH laws were commensurate with those for crimes such as negligence.

An estimated 15 percent of the working-age population worked in the informal economy, where there was limited enforcement of labor laws. Workers in the informal sector, particularly in small-scale mining, often were exposed to dangerous conditions and hazardous substances such as mercury.

Limited data were available on workplace accidents. The International Labor Organization, however, noted an increasing number of serious or fatal occupational accidents, as well as steps by labor inspectors to begin OSH training in mines, construction, and public service. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and severe budgetary constraints, these training sessions were postponed. Most fatal occupational accidents were in the mining sector.

The Labor Inspectorate, along with other government agencies, actively verified that businesses enforced COVID-19 prevention protocols as mandated by the government. Labor unions repeatedly called private-sector COVID-19 vaccination requirements discriminatory and a violation of local labor laws. The Ministry of Labor stated that employers are not allowed to issue vaccine requirements and called on employees who were fired for not being vaccinated to report their cases. Private employers continued with these requirements, and vaccination requirements were also implemented in new hiring policies.

**Informal Sector:** Workers in the formal sector may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, and

authorities effectively protected employees in this situation. Workers in the informal sector did not enjoy the same protection.